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Improving the speaking skill using reading contextual internet-based instructional materials in an EFL class in Indonesia

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to solve speaking problems of students in an EFL class using contextual internet-based instructional materials. The study employed Classroom Action Research design in a speaking class at an English Education Department at a university in Indonesia. The study consisted of two cycles. Each cycle consisted of planning, implementation, observation and reflection. The criterion of success was that $\geq 80\%$ of the students must gain speaking score of ≥ 75 . The results of cycle 1 revealed that less than 80% of the students achieved the criterion; consequently the revised plan for cycle 2 was implemented. The results of cycle 2 revealed that more than 80% of the students gained score ≥ 75 and therefore the cycle was stopped. The design and development process of the instructional materials are discussed and the steps in implementing teaching integrated reading and speaking in EFL teaching and learning (TIRS) are proposed.

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1. Introduction

Speaking as one of the language skills becomes important topics to discuss in language teaching. The discussion topics can be related to the instructional techniques, the instructional materials, the instructional media, the language teachers, the language learners, and even the speaking components. The instructional techniques hold an important role to motivate and activate learners, the instructional materials play the role to contextualize the language usage and to meet language learners' needs, instructional media bring the teaching into real life situation, the teachers facilitate and ease the learning process, the learners manifest and produce meaningful and appropriate utterances as

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an indicator of the instructional success, and the speaking components relates to which components of the speaking to be the emphasis in a speaking class activities. In addition, success in studying a language is often measured by learners' ability to speak in the language being learned. More importantly, Harmer (2007) argues that language learners use all language they know when they speak. Therefore, research is always needed and recommended to improve the teaching and learning techniques to improve the speaking skills that enable learners to communicate.

The ability to use the language as a means of communication often judges one's successfulness in speaking class in language learning. This success is detected when a language learner can use the language to express his ideas, feeling, and thought in the form of monologue or dialogue or the success can be simply seen when language learners are able to express their purposes or when language learners are able to make a conversation with others. Nunan (1995) argues that speaking is an important aspect of language learning whether it is as a second or a foreign language and the success is measured by the ability of language learners to carry out conversation in the language being learnt. This is in line with Richard's (2008) viewpoint that speaking is an important skill in language learning that enable language learners to communicate not only in expressing view point but also in giving responses. It is also agreed that speaking as a productive skill is related to the ability of language learners to process information during the conversation (Harmer, 1991; Burns and Joyce, 1997; Brown, 2001). It implies that speaking deals with the ability to process messages so that utterances produced are appropriate with the context of the conversation and hence the produced utterances meet the purpose of the conversation.

Improving the speaking skill of students in English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) becomes an issue. Quite a few EFL teachers expect their students to be able to speak accurately after the teaching learning process. On the other hand, most learners find it difficult to express grammatically correct sentences due to the significant differences in the grammar of the native language of the students and that of the EFL and consequently they prefer to put emphasis in fluency rather than on accuracy during the speaking activities. Cultural difference is also considered to contribute to the difficulties of EFL learners to use English in their daily conversation (Richards and Rodgers, 1986; Ho, 2009) and in appropriate social interaction (Schumin, 2001; Efrizal, 2012). Despite the faced problems in the teaching and learning of speaking, Heaton (1988) proposed that in the teaching of speaking learners must master the three components of speaking; fluency, accuracy, and comprehensibility or appropriacy. It means that there must be efforts to choose effective techniques in teaching speaking and willingness to create and design interesting instructional materials that facilitate the achievement of the three speaking components.

Techniques in teaching speaking holds important role to improve the speaking skill. The teaching of speaking must open up wide opportunities for learners to practice. Harmer (1991) suggests that the importance of presentation, practice, and communication/production during the teaching of speaking in order to meet the real purpose of the teaching cannot be neglected. Widiati and Cahyono (2006) highlight the importance of techniques in selecting classroom activities in a speaking class. More importantly, Jones (2007) suggests that language teachers as well as the instructional materials guide students, manage students activities, and direct learning during the language teaching and learning process. Therefore, the role of the EFL or ESL teachers are not only limited to the choice of effective techniques but also on creativity and innovation to design and develop instructional materials.

Well developed instructional materials help language learners improve language mastery. The choice of speaking instructional materials is influenced by the techniques employed in teaching and learning process. Widiati and Cahyono (2006) reveal the importance of materials for communicative activities to make students ready to speak. They analyze and report the results of studies in speaking in relation to the choice of the teaching materials in Indonesia. Their conclusion is that the teaching materials can be either prepared by language learners or language teachers. Manurung (2012) also highlights that effective instructional materials contain task and activities that promote not only cognitive skills but also psychomotor skills. However, the teaching materials prepared by the language learners bring about memorization of utterances, while the teaching materials prepared by the teachers underpin spontaneous utterances. This is in line with Richards (2001), Richards and Renandya (2002), and Moore (2005) viewpoints that instructional materials should be based on the needs, interest, or even the problems experienced by the language learners to allow fluent and appropriate speech. This supports what have been believed in language teaching that language teachers and instructional materials create efficient and joyful learning (Lewis and Hill, 1985). This has been the main concern of this study where contextual internet-based instructional materials are used to improve the speaking skill of university students in Indonesia.

The speaking skill of the students at English Education Department at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Tadulako University needs to be improved. It is observed that the achievement of the students in the

speaking classes has not been satisfying. Many of them still find it difficult to begin monologue and dialogue, to keep a conversation going on continuously, and to sum up and conclude monologue and dialogue. It is also noted that the students are not active in the speaking class, and more importantly the students are reluctant to ask questions during discussion sessions. This research intends to overcome those problems and therefore the question to be answered is *how does the implementation of contextual internet-based instructional materials improve the speaking skill of the students?* The findings of this research will contribute to the improvement of the techniques in the teaching of speaking and the development of the instructional materials in speaking classes.

2. Method of the research

This research employed classroom action research (CAR). The steps of the CAR; planning, implementation, observation and reflection were implemented. The research was conducted in two cycles where each cycles consisted of four meetings. The setting of the research was at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Tadulako University in Indonesia. The subjects were 29 students who enrolled in the *Speaking IV class* 2013/2014 academic year. The data were collected by scoring individual oral presentation and participation in each cycle. Field notes and observation were also conducted. The field notes were based on the classroom situation and interaction and the observation was based on the way individual students speak and respond during the class.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Cycle 1

Cycle 1 consisted of four meetings. In the planning phase, the lesson plan was prepared based on the syllabus and the previously identified problems. The identified problems are; difficulty to begin monologue and dialogue, difficulty to maintain a conversation or dialogue, difficulty to sum up and conclude monologue and dialogue, hesitation to be active in the speaking class, and reluctant to ask questions during the discussion session. The instructional objectives were used as the basic of the selection of the possible instructional material topics. The topics were planned and chosen based on the student's real experiences in learning the language skills and the language components. Each group was assigned to discuss either their problems in one of the language skills or one of the language components during their English study period. The assigned topics also related to the same case faced by other EFL learners reported in journal articles or any other popular writings posted in the internet. It was decided that the scoring system was based on the individual active participation during the speaking class. In the implementation phase, the three phase technique, pre-activities, while activities, and the post activities, was implemented. During the pre-activities, the purpose of the study and the instructional objectives were introduced. The students were divided into group of four to five so there were seven groups. The placement of the students into group was done based on their attendance list. It was decided that group one discussed their problems in listening, group two in speaking, group three in reading, group four in writing, group five in grammar, group six in vocabulary, and group seven in pronunciation. In the observation phase, individual active participation was check-listed in the column that has been previously prepared and notes were jotted down based on the classroom situation during the four meetings implementation phase. Two groups did the topic presentation in each meeting. The presentation lasted for twenty minutes and it was followed by thirty minutes question and answer session among the groups. Around five to ten minutes were planned to conclude or to sum up the presentation. In the post-activities phase, it was time for students to express their point of view of the presentation and to summarize what they have got after the discussion. The class was ended up by highlighting how to begin, to keep a conversation goes on continuously, and to conclude or sum-up a monologue or a dialogue. The achievement of the set criterion in cycle 1 is graphed in figure 1.

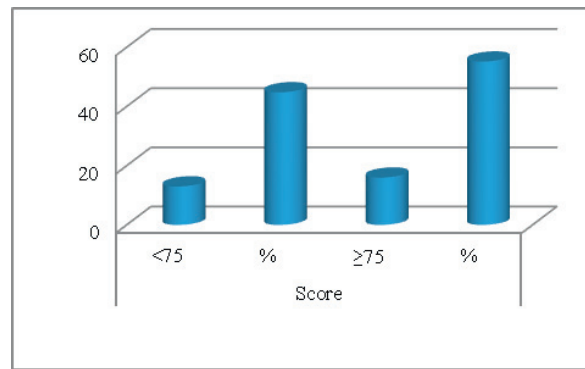


Figure 1. The results of cycle 1

The figure indicates that there are still quite a few students who have not passed the set criteria. The results are also presented in the percentage table as can be described in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of cycle 1

	Score			
	<75	%	≥75	%
Cycle 1	13	44,8	16	55,2

The data indicate that there are still 13 or 44.8% of the subjects who have not passed the set criteria. Since the criteria of success was planned based on the individual active participation and presentation, the results of the observation on the students active participation are graphed in figure 2.

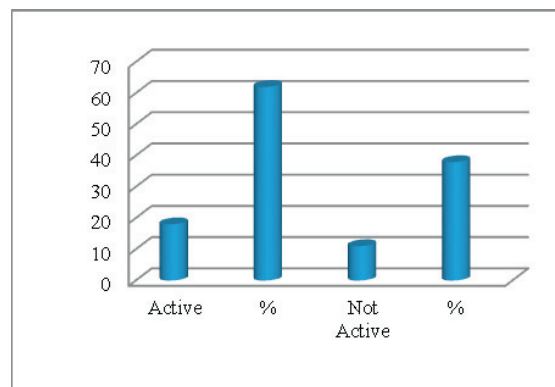


Figure 2. The results of the observation in cycle 1

The figure indicates that there are many students who are not active during the discussion and meetings in cycle 1. The number and the percentage of the students who are not active are presented in table 2.

Table 2. The results of the observation

	Active	%	Not Active	%
Cycle 1	18	62,01	11	37,9

In the reflection phase, it is concluded that the criterion of success has not been achieved and that the revised

plan must be prepared. Consequently the research has to continue to cycle 2. The results of the reflection indicate that there must be improvement in the choice of the discussion or presentation topic, in the pre, while, post activities during the implementation, role of the group member, and the conclusion or the sum-up session.

3.1.2. Cycle 2

Cycle 2 consisted of four meetings. The member of the group in cycle 2 was the same students as the member of group in cycle 1. In the planning phase, the revised plan, the discussion or presentation topic for each group was revised. Each group freely chose and decided a contextual internet-based topic or issue based on the interest of the group. The topics or issues were downloaded and printed out from any website. Before the classroom meeting and discussion, every member of the group was assigned to read the chosen topic individually and then discuss the topic or issue in their small group discussion. The group discussed the topic or issue and decided the role of each member for the classroom meeting; a member of the group who introduced and began the presentation, who explained or described the chosen issue, and who concluded the presentation. The member of the group was only allowed to bring clues or keywords during the classroom presentation. The implementation phase in cycle 2 was the same as the one in cycle 1; pre-while-post activities. However, the pre-and post-activities were revised. In the pre-and post activities, it was reminded the importance of using beginning and closing expressions in speaking both in monologue and dialogue. The results of cycle 2 are graphed in figure 3.

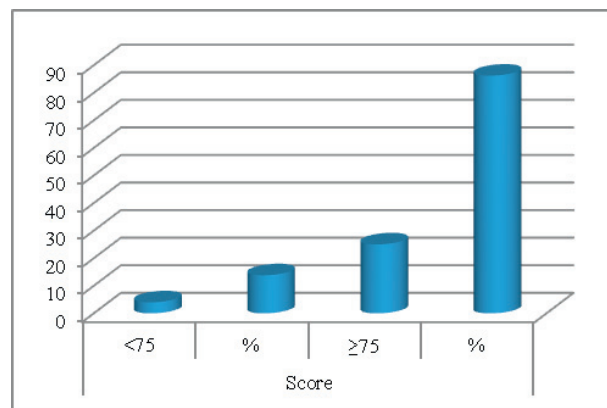


Figure 3. The results of cycle 2

The data in figure 3 indicate that only few students who get lower than the set criterion and the ones who achieved the set criterion increased. The number and the percentage of the students who have achieved the set criterion are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Results of cycle 2

	Score			
	<75	%	≥75	%
Cycle 2	4	13,8	25	86,2

The data in table 3 indicate that 25 out of 29 or 86.2% have achieved the criteria of success and only 4 out of 29 or 13.8% who have not passed the set criterion. The active participation of the students in cycle two was also observed. The data of the active participation are graphed in figure 4.

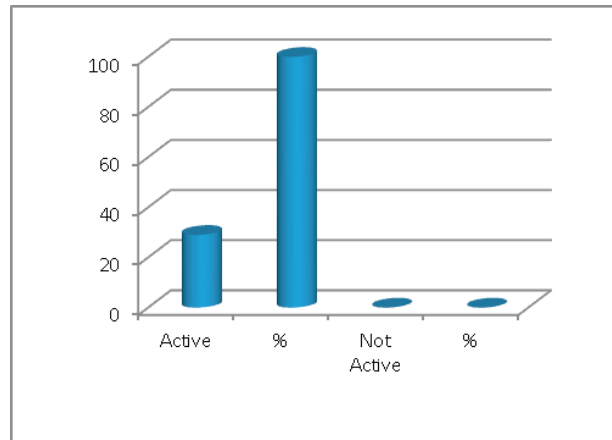


Figure 4. Participation of the students in cycle 2

The data in figure 4 indicate that all of the students are active. It can be seen also in Table 4 that 29 or 100% of the students are active.

Table 4. Active participation

	Active	%	Not Active	%
Cycle 2	29	100	0	0

The data in table 3 indicate that all of the students participate actively during the classroom meetings and presentation in cycle 2. Since the criteria of success has been achieved and that all of the students have been active during the classroom meeting and presentation, the cycle was stopped.

In the reflection of cycle 2, it is noted that the students' achievement increase from cycle 1 to cycle 2. The improvement is graphed in figure 5.

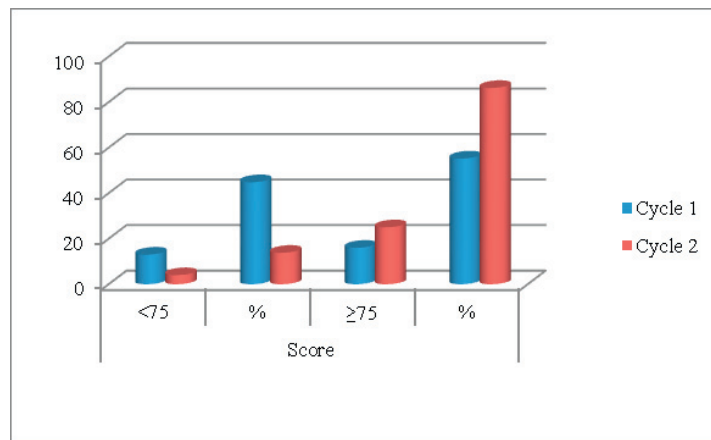


Figure 5. The comparison of the achievement of cycle 1 and 2

The data in figure 5 indicate that the students who passed the criteria increase significantly from cycle 1 to cycle 2. The same case applies to the improvement in the student's active participation during the class meeting and

presentation. The improvement in the student's active participation between cycle 1 and cycle 2 is graphed in figure 6.

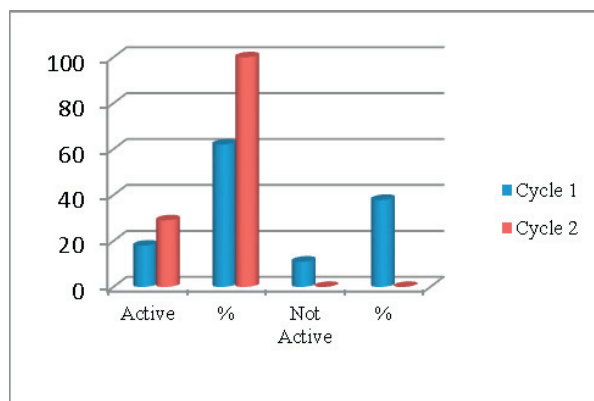


Figure 6. The comparison of the active participation in cycle 1 and cycle 2

The data in figure 6 indicate that all of the students who are not active in cycle 1 become active in the classroom meeting and the presentation in cycle 2. The improvement of the students' speaking skill achievement and the improvement in the active participation during the classroom meeting and presentation are believed to be affected by the implementation of the revised plan.

3.2. Discussion

The research question has been answered during the implementation of cycle 1 and cycle 2. The speaking skills of the students get improved by using contextual internet-based instructional materials in the speaking class in two cycles. There are at least two potential factors that have been implemented during the cycles to overcome those problems, the first is the way to choose instructional materials for the group discussion topic and the second is the integration of the reading and speaking activities in the instructional procedure.

3.2.1. The discussion topic selection

Referring back to the previous identified problems in the speaking class; difficulty to begin monologue and dialogue, difficulty to maintain a conversation or dialogue, difficulty to sum up and conclude monologue and dialogue, hesitation to be active in the speaking class, and reluctance to ask questions during the discussion session, it is noted that the way to select instructional materials particularly the discussion topics in cycle 1 holds important role. The change of the way to assign the discussion topic in cycle 1 and in cycle 2 provides the students with opportunities to choose topic in which they are interested in. The opportunity to freely choose topics from any website in internet opens up wide possibility for the students to choose topic which is contextual and based on their interest. This technique seems potential to create efficient and joyful learning to overcome the problems of the students in speaking and to improve their speaking skills in the following ways; Firstly, the topic that the students is interested in motivates them to read and discuss with others; Secondly, the students should have got previous knowledge and experiences related to the topics and consequently there have been at least stock of vocabularies related to the topics; Thirdly, when the topic is contextual the students get opportunities to hear or even to listen to the topics in their daily encounter and hence help them broaden their understanding of the topics; and finally, since the topics is internet-based, it can be read and downloaded from different websites or sources that can enrich their data and ideas of the topics. Since the students are assigned to download and print out the discussion materials they have more opportunities to read and reread the topics in their own spare time and on their own phase.

3.2.2. The instructional procedure

The second potential factor that has contributed to the way to solve the problems in speaking and the improvement of the speaking skill is the instructional procedure. The instructional procedure helps solve the speaking problems of the students in the following ways; firstly, the pre-activities process. The introduction and presentation of the way to begin, to keep and maintain monologue and dialogue or conversation, and to sum up speaking activities prior to classroom discussion and presentation build self-confidence of the students. The students are also guided to work on the chosen topics particularly to assign each member of the group to play a role in the real classroom presentation. The assignment of the individual students to download and read the chosen topic prior

to attending small group discussion in the pre-activities encourages each group member to prepare for the discussion. Secondly, the integration of reading and speaking helps students make notes by writing down clues or keywords that help them build up self-confidence in the classroom meeting and presentation. These techniques also help students to maintain their explanation or description of topics and lengthen the period of the discussion and presentation. More importantly, this techniques allow the students to implement scanning and skimming techniques in reading by making notes on personal names, place, time, and location while reading which are used as a guide during the classroom discussion and presentation. Third, the assignment of the group member to play role motivate them to get active during the classroom meeting and presentation. Finally, the scoring system which is based on the active participation during the classroom discussion and group presentation encourages students to take part; describing or explaining the topics, arguing, commenting, answering or responding, or even asking for clarification. In short, the implemented teaching and learning procedure in this CAR proposes the introduction and implementation of TIRS (Teaching Integrated Reading and Speaking). The steps can be briefly proposed as follows; 1) Freely choose a topic for a small group; 2) Read the topic individually before small group discussion; 3) Make individual clues or keywords; 4) Bring the individual clues and keywords to small group discussion; 5) Revise the clues or keywords in the small group discussion; 6) Decide role of each group member before classroom meeting and presentation.

4. Conclusion

The implementation of contextual internet-based instructional materials improves the speaking skill of the students. The improvement in the speaking skill is seen in the individual student active participation in explaining or describing the chosen topic, the ability to play the assigned role in the classroom meeting and presentation, the ability to ask questions, the ability to answer or respond questions, and the ability to comment and argue during the discussion. There are two ways on how the improvement is achieved using the contextual internet-based instructional materials; The first is the procedure in the selection of the discussion topic which is contextual and based on the interest of the students found in website in the internet motivates students to actively participate in the classroom meeting and presentation; The second is the instructional procedure which allows the students to actively participate in the classroom meeting and presentation. The implementation of the three phase techniques in the instructional process allows the students to read the chosen topic individually and then in the small group prior to classroom meeting and presentation. The findings imply that TIRS potentially improve the speaking skill of the students in the Speaking class in EFL teaching at the university level.

Acknowledgment

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